

Representations of Children in Street Situation in Brazilian
Literature from the 16th to the 20th Century: Journeys of a
(De)constructed Field /
*Representações de crianças em situação de rua na literatura
brasileira do século XVI ao XX: travessias de um campo em
(des)construção*

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ABSTRACT

The present article aims to analyze the representation of children in conditions of social vulnerability in Brazilian literature, focusing on characters facing marginalization and homelessness. We conducted a bibliographical research that discusses childhood from various perspectives, tracing a historical overview of children in situations of need and homelessness, as depicted by renowned authors selected to compose the research corpus. Brazilian literature has consistently engaged with social issues of each era, as evident in works such as *A Escrava Isaura* by Bernardo Guimarães, *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* by Machado de Assis, *O Cortiço* by Aluísio de Azevedo, *Capitães da Areia* by Jorge Amado, and *Grande Sertão Veredas* by Guimarães Rosa. The analyzed works portray the so-called "excluded" individuals from society, marginalized and often deprived of documentation or a home, practically considered non-existent. In this regard, the present study draws theoretical support from authors like Machado (2006), Kramer (2003), Polinésio (1994), and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (1990) document. Consequently, Brazilian children living on the streets, long disregarded for centuries, have now drawn the attention of society, which can no longer afford to ignore this issue.

KEYWORDS: Child; Brazilian literature; Childhood; Poverty.

RESUMO

*O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar a representação da criança em condição de vulnerabilidade social na literatura brasileira, abordando personagens que enfrentam a marginalização e a falta de moradia. Realizamos uma pesquisa bibliográfica que discute a infância sob diversas perspectivas, traçando um histórico das crianças em situação de carência e desabrigo, retratadas por autores renomados selecionados para compor o corpus de pesquisa. A literatura brasileira sempre se engajou nas questões sociais de cada época, sendo evidente em obras como *A Escrava Isaura* de Bernardo Guimarães, *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* de Machado de Assis, *O Cortiço* de Aluísio de Azevedo, *Capitães da Areia* de Jorge Amado e *Grande Sertão Veredas* de Guimarães Rosa. As obras analisadas retratam os chamados "excluídos" da sociedade, pessoas marginalizadas e muitas vezes desprovidas de documentos ou um lar, consideradas praticamente inexistentes. Nesse sentido, o presente trabalho tem como aporte teórico autores como Machado (2006), Kramer (2003), Polinésio (1994), e o documento do Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (1990). Portanto, as crianças brasileiras em situação de rua, por séculos ignoradas, têm agora despertado a atenção da sociedade, que não pode mais se dar ao luxo de ignorar essa problemática.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Criança; Literatura brasileira; Infância; Pobreza.

1 Introduction

The main objective of this article is to analyze how street children are portrayed by renowned authors in the literary field. The focus of this research focuses on the representation of poor and oppressed boys, who are portrayed in Brazilian literature from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.

Throughout the history of Brazilian literature, several fundamental works have explored the theme of the exclusion of the individual from society, encompassing not only the poor, but also all those marginalized and ignored over the centuries. Among these people are children, who, deprived of home and documents, face a life of misery, often forced to live and work in the difficult conditions of the Brazilian streets, struggling to survive under the most adverse circumstances imaginable. Some of the

works that address these situations of exclusion and portray street children include *A Escrava Isaura*, by Bernardo Guimarães, presenting the story of Isaura, a young slave who faces marginalization and social prejudice; *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, by Machado de Assis, which discusses social inequality and the lack of opportunities for the less favored, although it does not focus directly on disadvantaged children; *Capitães da Areia*, by Jorge Amado, an emblematic work that portrays the life of a group of abandoned children living on the streets of Salvador; and *O Cortiço*, by Aluísio de Azevedo, which addresses the precarious living conditions of the residents of a tenement, including children in situations of vulnerability.

In the following topics, we promote a comprehensive discussion about childhood from various perspectives, tracing a historical journey of children in poverty and street situations through the works of renowned authors, carefully selected to compose the research corpus.

To offer a solid theoretical basis for this study, we turned to the contributions of influential authors, such as Machado (2006), Kramer (2003), Polynesian (1994), in addition to the framework provided by the Child and Adolescent Statute (1990).

By presenting the theme, objective, research problem, possible hypotheses and the planning of the stages of this research, we seek to offer an in-depth exploration of the subject, while addressing its theoretical feasibility and contemporary relevance. Subsequent sections will delve into the results of the bibliographic research, contributing to a deeper understanding of the representation of children in poverty and street situations in Brazilian literature.

2 The first children in Brazilian literature from the sixteenth to the twentieth century

Engaged in social issues of the most diverse eras, Brazilian literature has always represented, to a greater or lesser degree, the impasses of the current societies. Demonstrating this fact, *A Escrava Isaura*, by Bernardo Guimarães, *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, by Machado de Assis, *O Cortiço*, by Aluísio de Azevedo, *Capitães da Areia*, by Jorge Amado and *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, by Guimarães Rosa, are some examples of this.

Of these works, many deal with the so-called "excluded" of society – not only the poor, but also considered non-citizens – without documents or homes. Simply, non-existent people. Brazilian street

children, in this sense, ignored for centuries, have made society launch a new look at such a scenario, no longer reserving it to subalternity, since ignoring the problem is no longer a viable option. This change in perspective is also supported by the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA), which recognizes the need for protection and special attention to children in situations of vulnerability, guaranteeing their rights and ensuring their inclusion in society (BRASIL, 1990).

However, the phenomenon of portraying children in Brazilian literature is not in fact recent, as observed by Marisa Lajolo (1997), renowned researcher and literary critic. Already in 1500, in the letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha to the king Portuguese D. Manuel, it is mentioned the presence of a child, who was in the arms of a woman, wrapped in a cloth that revealed only her legs, while the mother did not bring any cloth. This historical reference illustrates that the theme of children in literature dates back to the beginnings of Brazilian colonization.

Thus, we have the representation only of the legs of the first child character of Brazilian literature. The literary document in question consists of a language pierced by metaphors and subjectivities of Pero Vaz, in addition to the objective description of the new land and its inhabitants. Three centuries later, an Indian child receives prominence in another literary text, which is Moacir, a character from José de Alencar's novel *Iracema*, published in 1865. The child appears at the beginning of the work, but what is reported is the end of the story: Iracema dead, Martim and Moacir on a raft aimlessly. If we think of rivers as streets, in that period, we would have the first street child. But at least with one parent protecting him.

Still in this attempt, Casimiro de Abreu, in his poem *My eight years* (1859), brings the nostalgia of the valiant childhood, which he calls the "dawn" of his life. Childhood is portrayed in a nostalgic way, in the perspective of a time when the years do not return. Sighing flowers, dreams and loves lived under the shade of the orange groves, he sighs with the beauty of such moments and the innocence. With this, we have an idealized vision represented by the ideal happiness associated with each verse.

Rescuing the beginnings of Brazilian literature, the child was presented as fragile, pure, innocent and protected, however, it is not for long that this way of approaching childhood remained. It was also in the nineteenth century that the writer Machado de Assis, through his short stories, showed adults exercising power and dominion over children, in the works *Conto de escola*, from 1884, and *Pai contra mãe*, from 1906.

In the twentieth century, with publication in 1920, Monteiro Lobato publishes his short story *Negrinha*, which illustrates a poor black child after the abolition of slavery in Brazil. A seven-year-old girl, who received mistreatment and dies of sadness when she discovers that life went beyond the treatment she had received until then.

Negrinha was a poor seven-year-old orphan. Black? No: beetle, dark mulatto, with red hair and scared eyes. He had been born in the slave quarters to a slave mother and his early years had lived them in the dark corners of the kitchen, on old mats and filthy rags. Always hidden, that the mistress did not like children. Excellent lady, the mistress. Fat, rich, master of the world, beloved of priests, with a right place in the church and luxury cabin reserved in heaven. Stuck the lards on the throne (a rocking chair in the dining room), there she embroidered, received her friends and the vicar, giving audiences, discussing the time. A virtuous lady in short – "lady of great apostolic virtues, mainstay of religion and morals", said the reverend (LOBATO, 1967, p. 3).

The author, ironically, extols the qualities of the mistress in question and describes the growth of black. The story, however, has mitigating factors in relation to the rational prejudice regarding the color of black, and above all, corroborates with the others that address the theme of invisible children in Brazilian literature.

Living in horrible conditions, the child Negrinha grew up resigned, until, in contact with the treatment that other children – "beautiful blond girls, rich, born and raised in a feather nest" appear in the story and Negrinha discovers not only that there were toys, but that there was a difference in treatment between her and such girls (LOBATO, 1967).

Lobato, in this tale, in a cutting and more explicit way than Machado de Assis, demonstrates the duality in the differential way in which children from different social classes received treatment. The phenomenon, in this way, of invisible children in Brazil, originates with the relations between master / slave and extends to the present day.

In addition, several contemporary works also feature characters that illustrate this social duality. An example is the novel *Cidade de Deus* by Paulo Lins, which presents the reality of children growing up in the midst of violence and marginalization in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. Another example is the book *Menino de Engenho* by José Lins do Rego, which portrays the life of a northeastern boy in the midst of poverty and exploitation in a sugar cane plantation. These contemporary works are

important to broaden the reflection on the social issues that affect children in vulnerable situations in Brazil, highlighting the persistence of the problem over time.

Also in 1920, in the same volume of short stories entitled *Negrinha*, we find a short story called *The Treasury*, in which the narrator proposes comparisons between the human organism and what it is like to live in the city:

The street is the artery; the passers-by, the blood. The disorderly, the drunk and the cat are the evil microbes, disturbers of the circulatory rhythm determined by work, in particular of Italian immigrants. The police soldier is the white blood cell – Metchenikoff's phagocyte. As soon as the traffic is congested by the anti-social action of the disorderly, the phagocyte moves, walks, runs, falls deep on the bad element and drags it to chess (LOBATO, 1967, p. 53).

The microbe described in the tale was a child character, in ragged clothes, terrified and lost in the events. At the age of nine, Pedrinho, the eldest son of an Italian couple, builds a shoeshine box in order to help his parents. A supervisor passes by the place and asks for the license for the work to happen and the boy, who did not understand what it consisted of, much less had such a license, is taken home by the inspector, who fines them and takes their savings. Pedrinho, at this moment, takes a beating in the yard while the inspector spends the money received in the nearest bar. At this moment, as in the story of *Negrinha*, we have a kind of denunciation in order to draw the reader's attention to the poor and oppressed, changing only the scenario in which the characters are inserted – since the latter are Italian immigrants.

Finally, also in 1920, Lima Barreto published his book *Histórias e Sonhos (Stories and Dreams)* and, with it, we have the representation of invisible characters – poor and on the margins of society, such as the short story *O Moleque*, which deals with a poor boy, the son of a black woman washerwoman, without time to play or study, since he has to work hard to help his mother. In this sense, for Júlia Marchetti Polinésio, in *O conto e as classe subalternas*, published in 1994, until the year 1920, the feeling of sympathy for the humble and the attitude of denouncing the injustices that occurred in society were not constant, but sporadic expressions in the literary environment (POLINÉSIO, 1994).

Machado de Assis, Monteiro Lobato and Lima Barreto show the face of the Brazilian child ignored for centuries. The childhood here called "invisible" – on the margins of society, figures as a

character. It is relevant to highlight that the street child itself, as will be discussed below, is hidden until the mid-1930s, although in the texts *Negrinha* and *O fisco*, by *Monteiro Lobato*, and *O moleque*, by Lima Barreto, brought here, for example, one can already find remnants of the theme of oppression of Brazilian subalternized children.

3 Street children in Brazilian literature

When it comes to street children in Brazilian literature, it is in the year 1922 that we have, from the novel by Ranulpho Prata, a doctor and writer from Sergipe, known for his friendship with Lima Barreto, the work *Within life*.

The novel in question tells the story of Benedict, who is a poor boy who becomes a street boy after the death of his parents. Luis Bueno, PhD in literary theory from Unicamp, in his book published in 2006 entitled *A history of the novel of 30*, points out this work of Ranulpho as a precursor of the novel of the 30s, because it brings a poor protagonist, who was a street boy, characterizing itself as the first work of Brazilian fiction in which the theme of invisible children – in street situation – is addressed.

Mário de Andrade, in 1923, publishes *Piá does not suffer? Suffers*. His tale also features a poor, four-year-old boy named Paulinus, who is the son of an Italian woman and a prisoner. The mother, a laundress, with terrible conditions of salary to live and quite frustrated with the poverty in which she lived, uses this to, instead of giving support and protection to the child in question, beat him. In addition to being hungry, Paulinus grew up afraid:

There she woke up from fatigue, her son's little hand slapping her face in the face. She was desperate with anger. He threw his hand in the dark, hit where he hit, in the eyes, in the pit-of-the-stomach, pláa... Paulinus rolled away with a legitimate desire to put his mouth on the world. But his body remembered a time when the weeping had made the jump of the clog come right into his mouth, lost the taste of screaming. He kept whimpering so loudly that he even lulled Terezinha's sleep. Small, round, shrunken, talequalmente tatuzinho garden (ANDRADE, 1988, p. 37).

The four-year-old was so hungry that he began to eat of everything he could find:

In this hope of starving him, Paulinus descended into disgusting things. That is, going down, no. He was incapable of putting jerarchy in disgust, and even the last

edible invented was ant. But I can't deny that once even a cockroach... He grabbed it and went away chewing, more innocent than you, children of the disgusted. However, it is understood, they were foods that did not give any substance (ANDRADE, 1988, p. 40).

Moving in with a Spaniard, Paulino's mother takes him to live in his paternal grandmother's house. In the new home, hunger is no longer an issue, but the abuses of mistreatment become even more complicated. Paulino comes to see his mother once again, on the street where he lived; She had become a prostitute and later took pity on her son, but she thought he would be a "trampoline in the swamps" and left him abandoned and lonely. Paulinus, then, becomes the child in whom they unload revolts within their social cycle, because he is the most defenseless.

Thus, timely, the title of the short story *Piá suffers? Sofré* makes an ironic critique of the idealized and happy childhood sung by most Brazilian poets. The word *piá* works in the southern region of the country as a boy and the answer to Mário de Andrade's question about the suffering of children in Brazil has an answer in the title itself.

Although there is no range of literary works that deal with the problem of street children between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, in the nineteenth century we have, in Brazilian literature, a certain awareness about the unequal situation in which Brazilian children lived and live to the present day. Poor, excluded and marginalized children were often represented as submissive and used by consecrated authors as their expression of piety or revolt. It was in 1935, in this attempt, that Jorge Amado presented another perspective to street children: as mature, even if young. As beings who feel injustice, but who are also capable of challenging the ruling class.

An active participant in political life inside and outside his books, Jorge Amado is undoubtedly one of the greatest Brazilian writers. His personal experience at the age of thirteen, when he ran away from the boarding school in which he lived in Salvador, may have led him to become interested in the subject of street children. Strongly influenced by the writers Dickens and Victor Hugo and their novels that deal with children in situations of abandonment, in an interview, Jorge explained some of his ideals:

I want socialism because with it there will be no hunger, there will not be this terrible northeastern misery. But today I don't give up freedom in exchange for it. The word more there is important, because as a young man I accepted it. But there comes a time when you want both, that there is food and freedom. Unfortunately, in general, there is neither freedom nor food. Also in the capitalist world there is not much

freedom. It's very limited. Many will say that socialism with freedom is impossible and I will answer that it is the right to dream (MACHADO, 2006, p.91).

Bringing his ideals in the literary work, Jorge Amado publishes his first masterpiece, in 1935, called *Jubiabá* and already in the chapter *Beggar*, brings us the time when Antônio Balduino or Baldo, street boy, lived adventures and found an original way to beg with the group of street children of which he was a part: singing, through the voice of the character also known as Gordo: "Alms for seven blind [...] . I'm the oldest, this is the second, the others are at home, Dad is crippled, Mom is sick, Give me a handout to seven orphans, they are all blind [...]" (AMADO, 1987, p.67).

People thought to be brave still retorted: "So how is it... There are seven of them and there are more than ten... They are orphans and have a sick father and mother... Blind and see everything... How's that?" For the narrator, no one had the courage to face the boys who sang and, still to get rid of the group of ill-dressed children, gave alms.

Currently, some of the techniques used by children in situations of social vulnerability do not differ from those used in the literature of the 1930s, since they spend the day in large groups and are seen as threatening, although this is often a security strategy for themselves. Street children, therefore, aim at the survival of themselves and the other members of the group. At night, some look for places to spend the night, others return to the place where the family members are.

Regarding Baldo, the chapter of *Jubiabá* closes with the declaration of the power of children:

The emperor of the city eats in the best restaurants, rides in the most luxurious automobiles, lives in the newest skyscrapers. And without paying anything. After noon he goes with his group to a restaurant and says anything to a waiter. This one knows that it's no business to fight with these kids. He gives the leftover food wrapped in newspapers. Sometimes there is even food left over that they throw in the garbage cans. And old beggars eat the leftovers [...]
And he and his honor guard only sleep at the doors of the newest skyscrapers, where the employees know that all those kids have razors, daggers, knives. This is when they do not prefer to sleep on the sand of the port pier, looking at the huge ships, the stars in the sky, the mysterious green sea (AMADO, 1987, p.78).

Also in Jorge Amado, in *Bahia de Todos os Santos: Guia das ruas e dos mistérios da cidade do Salvador*, from 1944, we have a chapter dedicated to street children. Referring to his work *Captains of the Sand*, the author explains who these child characters are:

The cheeky tomboys, the lively look, the quick gesture, the slang of tricksters, the faces sucked with hunger, will ask you for alms. They also practice petty theft. Almost eight years ago I wrote a novel about them, the Sand Captains. The ones I met at that time are today made men, tricksters of the pier, with cachaça and guitar, factory workers, thieves registered in the police, but captains of the sand continue to exist filling the streets of the city, sleeping by the leu. They are not a bunch that came up at random, a passing thing in the life of the city. It is a permanent phenomenon born of the hunger that befalls the poor classes. The number of abandoned children increases daily (AMADO, 1965, p. 143).

In this chapter, the problem of abandoned minors in Brazil is described and unfortunately, bridging the gap with the present day, it is noticeable that the scene has not changed. Jorge Amado, in this sense, argues that the issue of street children is the result of the unfair distribution of income and discrimination suffered by these children and adolescents. Innovating the look brought until then by Brazilian literature that such children were needy and, therefore, weak and vulnerable, *the author of Jubiabá* and *Capitães da Areia* brings the idea that, although he does not support the lifestyle of street children, these have already shown themselves to be intelligent children, fighters and survivors of realities difficult to imagine for people of high social classes. In addition, authors such as Clarice Lispector and Rubem Fonseca also addressed the theme of marginality and poverty in their literature.

Clarice Lispector, in the foreground, considered as primarily intimate and subjective in her writing, also brings social concerns in her literature. Focusing on the drama of street children, there is a chronicle of the author published in *The discovery of the world*, which was published in *Jornal do Brasil*, from 1967 to 1973, during the so-called lead years of the Dictatorship.

The Hateful Charities is a text that masterfully brings Lispector's feelings towards a street child:

Was it on an afternoon of sensitivity or susceptibility? I passed the street quickly, entangled in my thoughts, as sometimes happens. That's when my dress held me back: something had gaped in my skirt. I turned around and saw that it was a small, dark hand. It belonged to a boy to whom the dirt and internal blood gave a warm skin tone (LISPECTOR, 1984, p.381).

Clarice then brings up the idea that the boy was on one of the steps of the confectionery and the child's eyes showed such distress as she asks him to buy a candy. In the chronicle, there is continuation: "I woke up at last. What had he been thinking before he met the boy? The fact is that his request seemed to accumulate a gap, to give an answer that could serve any question, just as a great rain can quench the thirst of those who wanted a few sips of water" (LISPECTOR, 1984, p. 381).

The author concludes the chronicle:

After all, a charitable soul appeared. This boy had been at this door for over an hour, pulling all the people who passed, but no one wanted to give. I walked away, my face flushed with shame. Shame really? It was useless to want to go back to the previous thoughts. I was filled with a feeling of love, gratitude, revolt and shame. But, as they say, the sun seemed to shine brighter. I had the opportunity to... And for that it had needed a skinny, dark boy... And for this it was necessary that the others had not given him a sweet (LISPECTOR, 1984, p. 383).

With this, Clarice Lispector brings her reluctance to see the problem of the street child and her discomfort when perceiving the reality brought by the boy's misery. In this sense, this explains part of the fact that street children were ignored by Brazilian writers for a long time. The chronicle in question managed to escape the censorship of the years of Military Dictatorship and bring a problem that is also still current: that of the alarming existence of street children.

In the background, Rubem Fonseca, a Brazilian writer born in Minas Gerais, chosen on purpose to close the discussion of the title of this section, proposes characters that are the result of an unfavorable environment. His tales demonstrate, for the most part, that crime and theft do not function only as a way out, but as a way to denounce people's revolt. A "[...] Rubem Fonseca's important characteristic is that he also eliminates the traditional dichotomy between the cultured narrator and the character of inferior social condition and goes even further, assuming the very personality of marginals and criminals (POLINÉSIO, 1994, p. 115).

In the book *Happy New Year*, published in 1975, there is a tale with the same name that explains the contrast in the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the poor. In the tale, there is a group of young people who are "poor, ugly, and toothless"; The interesting thing about this work is that the narrator is one of them. He, in turn, begins the text by watching the television and seeing that "the cool shops were selling rich clothes for the madams to wear on New Year's Eve" (p.8) and that "the houses of fine articles to eat and drink had sold all the stock" (p.8). The narrator, soon after, demonstrates his own situation: "I'll have to wait for the day to dawn and catch cachaça, dead chicken and farofa dos macumbeiros" (p.10).

The young men are described in a place that has drugs, guns, that stinks and decides to take revenge by invading the mansion in the midst of the New Year's celebrations. There, they invade, destroy and kill for the pleasure of taking revenge on the condition of poverty in which they lived. The

language, at this moment, is violent, with ways of expressing the cruelty of the response of young people, who respond with violence to the situation in which they found themselves. In this tale, Rubem shows us an important and current fact: the possibility of the oppressed classes turning against a ruling class that silences and ignores them.

4 The invisible children of the twentieth century

With the advent of the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, invisible children continued to exist and so did violence and poverty. There were also death squads that killed street children and beggars. The children themselves had an increase in violence practiced, and in 1990 the Ministry of Children approved the Statute of the Child and Adolescent – ECA. Despite functioning as one of the most advanced statutes today, even twenty years after its approval, there are still no plausible solutions that guarantee the basic rights of children and adolescents in Brazil.

However, if street children – invisible – suffered in the dictatorial period and continue to live the damage of their condition, in cinema and literature, on the contrary, they were quite successful, because much was published about them after the period of 1985.

In 1987, Giselda Laporta Nicodelis, in *A Sign of Hope* tells the story of Oldemar boy raised by his grandmother in the locality of the Brazilian favela. The character resists work in the drug trade. Later that same year, the book title: *O menino na Literatura Brasileira (The boy in Brazilian Literature)* was published and sought, according to the author herself: "The survey and analysis of works, from the constant childhood as a motive, and of the child as a character" (p.12), proposing to analyze the Brazilian narratives from 1922 to 1987. Ironically, street children were not considered in this work, as if they were not children. Still in this intent, 1922 is the year that, coincidentally, a street boy appears in a work of Brazilian romance: *Dentro da Vida*, by Ranulpho Prata.

In 1988, the publication *I like you so much*, by Leila Iannonne gains prominence, because the work deals with the story of a priest named Thomas, who spends his Christmas with the abandoned children living in the square of the Cathedral. Children are of various ages, suffer hunger and greater needs.

Millôr Fernandes, in a chronicle published in 1992 tries to explain the government's failure with

the situation of street children:

The old story; Every day the guy feeds lettuce to the tiger's cub, certain that this way he grows vegetarian. One day, as an adult the tiger, the guy smiles, happy with his experience, and the tiger eats the guy. Our public men act alike; they leave the children abandoned, without food, without a home, without education, without faith, and with a lot of glue in their, certain that in this way they will become experienced citizens, more adapted to the struggle for life (Jornal do Brasil, 22 abr. 1992).

In this chronicle, there is a clear explanation by Millôr of how public men deal with the abandoned minor, taking no action, leaving the children without support, abandoned in all respects, but still waiting for them to become experienced citizens for the daily struggle that life demands.

Thus, modernity brings a new discursive condition about childhood: as a subject of rights, since they are as much citizens as adults, and, for this reason, they must be considered and respected as such. In this regard, Kramer says that:

[...] Should we attend to children because it is law? No, the right must be guaranteed because it is our social responsibility, as teachers, women and men, citizens, to treat children as young citizens. We could talk about the advances, setbacks and impasses of childhood policies in Brazil. But it is worth remembering that this law represents an achievement of those who, over so many years, have been acting in the perspective of ensuring the rights of child populations (KRAMER, 2003, p.56).

The prevailing idea from the twentieth century onwards is therefore that the child is protected through laws that emerge from how he has been constructed and reconstructed over the centuries. On the one hand, children today present themselves as subjects of rights, on the other, many of these so-called "rights" still do not work in practice, preventing many from enjoying one of the most important of them: that of being a child.

Final considerations

Given the extent of the work and the corpus of works analyzed, it is notorious that Brazilian literature, over time, has been dedicated to portraying the socially excluded, with a special focus on marginalized children. Since the nineteenth century, renowned writers such as Monteiro Lobato and Mário de Andrade began to show interest in children on the margins of society, making them protagonists of their narratives and exposing social issues previously ignored in literature.

From the twentieth century, the relevance of works such as *Capitães da Areia* by Jorge Amado was highlighted, which brought to the public the reality of street children, giving them prominence within the novel and denouncing a secular problem that had been neglected by many writers. This and other publications of the time contributed to draw attention to the problems faced by children in situations of vulnerability, instigating a deeper reflection on social inequalities.

Literature, by embodying these excluded characters, reveals itself to be a potent weapon of denunciation in the face of the injustices and social inequalities present in Brazilian society. The literary representations of these children, often invisible to the eyes of society, provide a voice to these marginalized groups and enable their stories and struggles to be known and understood.

These literary works have the power to sensitize and make the reader aware of the difficulties faced by street children and poverty, stimulating a social mobilization for the search for effective solutions. By bringing these issues to the fore, literature can contribute to influencing fairer and more inclusive public policies, seeking to resolve the social impasses faced by these vulnerable children.

In this way, Brazilian literature plays a relevant role in raising awareness and broadening the debate on social inequalities, contributing to a more empathetic and engaged society in the search for a more just and egalitarian future for all children, regardless of their social conditions.

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